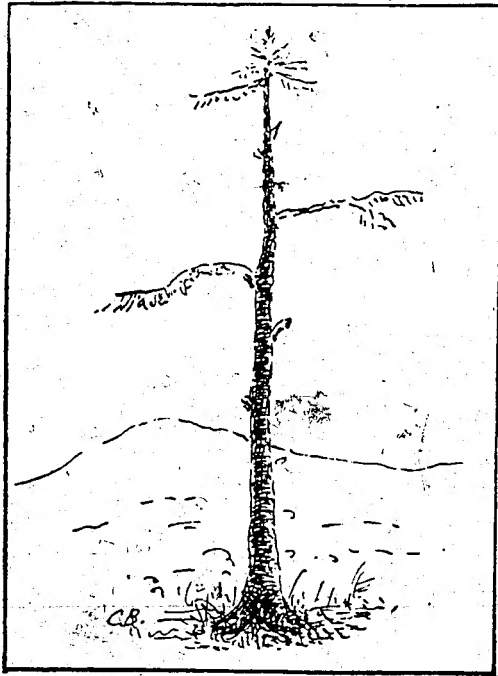


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# THE LAND OF THE LOBSTICK



The Log of a Canoe Journey in The Pas District  
of Northern Manitoba

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1920



# LAND OF THE LOBSTICK

By Charles A. Bramble

## CHAPTER I.

North of the Saskatchewan lies the Land of the Lobstick. For ages this has been given over to the trapper and the trader; rich in fur and seemingly, barren of aught beside, for the timber is by comparison with more accessible regions unimportant, and the lakes stocked though they be with fish are none so large as to promise any very important commercial fisheries. The climate is inferior to that of the prairie region, because of its changefulness, and the soil, excepting in a few favored spots, is not likely to attract the farmer, though garden crops come to maturity far to the northward of the district which it is proposed to describe.

Hence, the region has remained sparsely peopled, undeveloped, and almost unnoticed by the busy world outside. Generations of Indians have lived their lives under the sway of The Company, content to work and endure through the bitter winters gathering furs such as only Siberia may rival, loafing around the post through the summer, unless freighting for the trader, drawing their advance each fall and discharging the debt by the proceeds of the hunt, knowing nothing of outside happenings and caring not at all for anything beyond their narrow horizon. Until quite recently it seemed as though this peaceful stagnation was destined to endure—then came sensational discoveries of copper and gold ores, and it appears certain that changes are to take place and the old order to give place to one so different as to stagger the imagination.

Copper has been found in abundance, one of the discoveries, that at Flinflon, being estimated to contain a minimum of twenty million tons, and to win it railways and smelters are projected that will necessitate the labors of thousands of men, and the creation of centres of population such as Cobalt, and Porcupine, and Sudbury, in New Ontario. Nor is it probable that the finds made so far will prove anything but an assurance of numerous others to be unearthed from beneath the heavy covering of moss and tangled wildwood which blankets the entire surface, excepting for numerous muskegs and a few burned areas.

When we think of the northland we must sweep aside what has been and try and realize what is to be.

A few miles below the junction of the Carrot river with the Saskatchewan, a narrowing of the stream caused the trader of olden days to pitch his tent and erect his post, and the first arrivals being French-Canadians they called the place Le Pas—the step or strait—because of the short crossing which gave easy access to the opposite shore. After a long but uneventful history this settlement, now known as The Pas, began to take on a new life. Steamers brought goods from Grand Rapids, whence they had been transhipped from the Lake

Winnipeg boats, and after dropping a portion of their cargo steamed on up the turbid, shifting stream to Prince Albert, and even to the fort at Edmonton, almost under the shadow of the Rockies. The Pas was coming into its own, yet not until the Canadian-Northern railway reached it did it venture to call itself a city. But after this progress became rapid, and today there is a live, enterprising community of some fifteen hundred souls fully awake to the possibility of what the future holds out and determined to take advantage of them to the uttermost. You shall find everything in The Pas that you might reasonably expect to find in a city separated by 80 miles of muskeg from a main transcontinental line.

The hotels are remarkably good; the stores carry a supply of all that the frontier demands; the electric light, and the water supply systems are up to date, and this heretofore somnolent post plans to become the metropolis of a region so vast that you may travel for weeks by canoe in summer or by dog train in winter without reaching its confines. A great steel bridge spans the stream, and across it run the rails of the Hudson Bay railway, over which trains are being operated for 214 miles toward the terminus at Nelson. It is true that but a couple of trains a month at present have to suffice, but ere long a much more frequent service will be required, as numerous mining camps are springing up along the line and the whitefish and the sturgeon swarm in many a lake.

The Pas has had its real estate boom and has suffered the usual reaction, but, surely, the darkest hour has been passed, and a healthy growth, devoid of inflated valuations, should guarantee permanent prosperity. It is certain that the north country cannot be developed without in the long run assisting The Pas, for its position is strategically admirable.

First and foremost, it may be taken for granted the future prosperity of Northern Manitoba will depend almost entirely upon the discovery, opening out, and working of whatever minerals shall be found in the rocks. Happily there is reason to believe that it has great areas underlaid by just those Keewatin and Huronian strata which have elsewhere proved to be the Dominion's treasure chamber; there is, apparently, no reason to doubt that they will yield as richly of their contents as have identical formations in New Ontario. Moreover, such discoveries as have been made come at an opportune moment. Cobalt is on the down grade, this wonderful camp is reworking its tailings; few new finds of moment are made or, indeed, expected. Porcupine has half a dozen glorious properties, but the vast army of eager, hardy men who for the past 16 years have made history must now turn to other fields—and here is one awaiting them such as should suit their fancy. They may rest assured that beyond the Saskatchewan there is verge and scope for an army of prospectors, and, judging by what has already been found, few need go away empty.

Preliminary geological mapping has been done, and well done, too, Dr. E. L. Bruce, of the geological survey, having put in many seasons here, but though all recognize the magnificent work he has accomplished much remains to be deciphered, and the promising areas of greenstone, with numerous intrusions of the granites that are thought to have brought in the mineral bearing solutions, may well be vastly more numerous than is at present believed.

Just how far north the mineralized strata will be found none knows, though as they are possibly exposed over the top of a broad anticline the summit of which has been eroded, there must come a point beyond which it were useless to prospect for the same class of ores found at Flinflon, Schist and Copper Lake. Quite probably the mineral district will extend to the Churchill and beyond, in a northwesterly direction—but for the present none need trouble to go so far as in the stretch between Beaver Lake and Herb Lake there is a territory big enough for the most untiring. Nor is it as easy country to prospect—far from it. Much detail work and moss-scratching will be found necessary, and the man who scampers through the country, merely following the canoe routes, is not likely to be the most fortunate. The latest copper find—to be taken under option—by the Tonopah company—is situated on Thompson Lake some miles back from Athapapuskow, and is the



Hunting in Athapapuskow Country

result of extremely painstaking prospecting by an old Indian, David Connors by name. Many more such discoveries should await the husky fellow who caches his canoe and shoulders his pack sack.

Last summer there were possibly three hundred men in the district; this year there may be three thousand, for by all accounts a large delegation from the mining camps of New Ontario is making ready to come in. Winter comes in the district somewhat earlier than on the prairie, and when the writer was at Copper Lake on October 2nd, snow was already falling and the country apparently settling down to its long winter's sleep. But if winter comes early, the long days of springtime come early, too, and on account of the high latitude the nights are already short, in mid-April. For a couple of months in the summer there is practically no darkness.

The foregoing is a brief and quite inadequate introduction to a more detailed account of what the page actually saw in this wonderfully attractive land. Life is hard and travel rough, but those who have dwelt therein return to it however far they may have wandered. The north is a stern mother but she knows how to grip the heartstrings of her sons.

## CHAPTER II.

Though it may once have been true that "never a law of God nor man runs north of fifty-three," conditions have changed, and not only do law and order run but the Canadian Northern railway also runs (three times a week each way), and the pathetic Hudson Bay railway makes a gallant struggle to keep its steel bright for the first 214 miles by sending out bi-monthly trains. Knowing these things I left the city of Winnipeg, its departmental stores, its labor troubles and its high rentals behind on the morning of September 15th, 1919, just about one month too late for comfort on the trip I proposed making. My plan had been to go from Amisk Lake to Herb Lake, but ice and snow interfered, and I had to cut the voyage short, else I had, perhaps, been marooned at some remote point until the end of November.

Between Winnipeg and Hudson's Bay Junction, which is some eighty miles from The Pas, the country is so well known that a description would be superfluous; the facts that impressed me the most were the prosperous appearance of the farm houses, and the extraordinary number of prairie fowl.

One arrives at Hudson's Bay Junction at an unearthly hour of the morning—someone, I think, said we got there at 4 a.m., but as to this I cannot say from personal recollection. Next morning, however, we were passing through about as depressing a bit of country as the north can show. Muskeg on either hand, and an occasional dingy water tower made up the landscape, a picture blurred by a misty rain which, had I known it, would have warned me of many wet days and nights to come. But the reason this particular stretch is so unlovely is because of the reprehensible habit railways have of seeking low ground. Within sight of this muskeg the Pasqua Hills rear their splendidly afforested outlines for some seventy miles, and afford one of the last sanctuaries for moose, elk, caribou and bear south of the Saskatchewan.

One hint, for the benefit of future followers: take a "lunch" with you, because after leaving the Junction there is no dining car nor any provision for subsistence, so that should the train be late in arriving at The Pas the wretched traveller near perishes through starvation. Coming south the hotels thoughtfully provide all that is requisite packed in neat cardboard containers, though unless you should be furnished with a thermos bottle your chance of a hot cup of tea will depend upon the impression you have made upon the high officials of the train. My souchong came from the direction of the baggage car and was, indeed, a cup of thankfulness.

The Pas is beautifully situated on a spur facing the pas, or strait, which invited the first traders to settle. Many of the houses are tasty and attractive, the town plot is large enough for a city of five thousand and the stores and hotels are on the same ambitious scale. There are at least three inns of the first class in the place. I stopped at the Rupert, and found it quiet, clean and comfortable, and have no doubt I should have been equally satisfied with either of the others.

The Pas lives by transportation; talks of transportation; and, no doubt, dreams about transportation. It may be added that transportation is the one question all through the north. The erstwhile Canadian Northern railway was the first line to reach The Pas, and to make connection with the up-country points by the assistance of the steamers of the Ross Navigation company. Were it not for the railway you would

have some trouble in reaching The Pas, for there is not a wagon road between it and Hudson's Bay Junction, but merely a trappers' trail, and were it not for the Ross Navigation Company, you would have equal difficulty in leaving it. As it is, however, the *Nipawin*, built by Captain Ross, so well known in years gone by at Medicine Hat, Saskatoon Bridge, and numerous other widely scattered points, and who was in China navigating the Yang-Tze-Kiang in the interests of the C. P. R. Steamships, leaves for Cumberland House every Tuesday at 9 p.m. This little steamer is admirably fitted for passenger travel, with good cabins, smoking and dining saloons, and makes a trip up the swirling Saskatchewan one that even a frail woman may take without discomfort.

By midday on the following morning—September 17th—we were at the foot of the Big Stone rapids, a formidable obstruction, and one seemingly hopeless excepting to a craft with the power of a destroyer and the light draught of those celebrated gunboats which during the American civil war could run wherever the ground was in the least damp. The river comes thundering down with majesty and force, and is especially to be dreaded at low water, and I got there when the level was almost at its lowest. However, we eventually hauled the boat up by various cunning gadgets, in which a wire cable, several more or less wild men, and Captain A. A. Deacon figured prominently. We passengers, that is to say, Chas. L. Teasdale, Dominion land surveyor; Corporal Grennon, R. C. M. P.; F. M. Ruggles, a well known Winnipeg broker; S. L. Thompson, chief fire ranger for Saskatchewan, and the writer, assisted materially by our advice and moral support. These Big Stone rapids are a nuisance. To reach Cumberland lake, with its ancient Hudson's Bay post, founded in the 18th century, they must be surmounted, and at certain seasons this is impracticable, all freight having to be discharged at their foot and transported over the Pemman Portage, which is some three miles long, and generally muddy.

But the *Nipawin* on this occasion forced her way up, and we were soon navigating one of the most tortuous waterways of the north, the abominably crooked Big Stone river, a cut-off of the Saskatchewan. Cumberland House is not attractively situated; there is nothing picturesque in its site; a low shore and a silt-laden stretch of storm-lashed lake, but it is the main supply depot for a large back country, one which stretches to the Churchill and beyond. Mr. M. S. Cotter is the H. B. C. officer in charge, his brother holding a corresponding position with the rival Revillion firm. Like all the men I met up north, Mr. Cotter proved kindness-itself, and thanks to him I obtained a canoe and machine to drive it in the shape of a 2-horsepower Indian of the Swampy Cree species. He was a good canoeman, not a bad cook, obstinate, ignorant and weak in the back, with a lamentable disregard for the eighth commandment, of which he had possibly never heard. But such as he was he had to suffice. Here all supplies of an indispensable nature may be obtained, at an advance on city prices necessitated by high freight charges. For the benefit of such members of the fair-sex as may honor me by reading my screed I will print a few of the prices the Cree ladies pay when they go amarketing:

Tea, \$1 a pound; sugar, 25 cents a pound; plucked and drawn wild goose, weighing 10 to 12 pounds, \$1; a pair of mallard ducks, 25 cents, moose meat, 5 cents a pound; small plug of McDonald smoking, 35 cents (yes, the dusky beauties quite often indulge in the pipe, so they



tell me). There are several hundred Indians attached to Cumberland House, but most of the best hunters had already left for their trapping grounds, tempted by the fabulously high profits, to begin trapping just as soon as fur should be prime—usually about October 20th. With rats at \$4 apiece and other fur in proportion some of these men will acquire big wads of money next spring.

Cumberland House has always been an important post of the great company, yet for some years to come it will enjoy a higher lustre because of its being the scene of the story which relates to The-Chinaman-and-the-Indian-Woman. This tale is already the stock joke around many a camp fire, and is undoubtedly destined to spread with its variations and embellishments to the very verge of the Arctic ocean—but the reader must restrain his or her curiosity as to the details until the next instalment of these notes of travel

### CHAPTER III.

Having in my last writing raised the reader's curiosity as to the story of "The-Chinaman-and-the-Indian-Woman," I must now satisfy it. Firstly, let it be understood that for several years a son of the Flowery Kingdom, Yuen by name, has done business at Cumberland, competing successfully with the great companies, underselling them, in fact, by doing a strictly cash business. He has made a reputation for honest dealing and is a general favorite with white and Indian alike. Gradually adding to his wealth, it seemed as though the days of Yuen were to pass pleasantly and peacefully until such time as he elected to return to his native land, with wealth to buy a mandarinship and to settle down to unlimited rice and bird's nest soup. But, like many another, Yuen could not let well alone, and in an evil hour listened to those who told him he should marry.

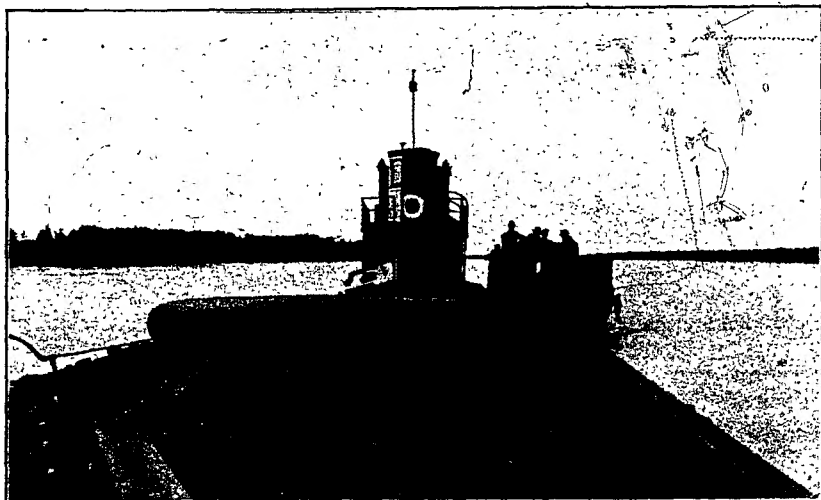
Having, however, once decided upon the momentous step, our Chinaman soon found the lady worthy of his affections, in the shape of an Indian maiden, Miss Matilda Greenleaf. This damsel could not be called handsome, if judged by our standards, but to Yuen her young beauty seemed glorious as that of the rising sun, and he placed himself, his store and his fat bank account at her feet. According to the most trustworthy account, the lady was not at first willing to marry, but his ardor, together with the pressure brought by Greenleaf père and Greenleaf mère, brought about her consent. Then the generous nature of the Oriental came to the front; a girl whose wildest extravagance had hardly gone beyond a new pair of moccasins, found herself with a trousseau such as might satisfy a society belle. The marriage license was secured, a church of England minister tied the knot, and Mr. and Mrs. Yuen were one—at least in the eyes of the law.

That night there were high revels at Cumberland. No less than \$500 worth of eatables and of drinkables, together with musicians galore, had been provided for a wedding such as the oldest inhabitant had n'er seen. All the quality, in the shape of the officials of the great fur companies, together with their wives, attended, and the hours sped quickly, what with a snack here and a snack



there, and an old-time Red River jig in between, until well on toward the wee sma' hours somebody noticed that the bride was absent. Then came the hurrying to and fro, such as happened according to Byron in Brussels on the eve of Waterloo; men searched the bushes and they searched the shores of the creek, they ransacked the houses, and they pried into the warehouses, where are stored thousands of skins at the close of each hunting season—but of the fair Matilda, no trace could be found! Presently it was discovered that a canoe was missing, and then it became but too evident that the bride had fled on the evening of her marriage day.

Forty-eight hours later she was recovered, soiled, but intact, hidden far in the bush. So they brought her back to Yuen, and he had her sworn before a justice of the peace, several H.B.C. officials and a minister or two, to be a good, affectionate, and faithful wife for evermore. Alas, this pious fit lasted but a few days, for Matilda



"Minasin," with Barge of Mandy Copper Ore on Saskatchewan River

again ran away, and this time Yuen gave it up. He may sell out his business and remove to some place where ladies are not so expert at canoeing and more appreciative of a nice, generous husband with a handsome balance at his bankers.

This is the true story of Yuen and his bride—all others are unofficial—especially those which make out he married her by trapper license. Yuen is an honorable man, and one who would scorn to trifle with the affections of any Matilda whatsoever.

But all this, say you, is not about mining. Please recollect the journey between Winnipeg and the mines is a long one, and if you have the necessary patience—and you won't go far in the northland without a plentiful stock of that virtue—we shall all arrive.

We will cross muddy Cumberland lake, where a boat drawing only 30 inches stirs up the mud. From Cumberland House to Sturgeon Landing is 35 measured miles, though how they were measured or by whom this chronicler knoweth not. We left the post shortly before dusk and came to an anchor in the narrows, a place infested

by the Canadian goose. Here we passed the night. In the morning a fog dense as that of our dear old Lunnon in November—though without the smoke—kept us at our anchorage until noon, but on its lifting we crossed Sturgeon Lake, deep and full of wonderful fish, they say, and in due course tied up to the bank at Sturgeon Landing.

This is the real jumping-off place. Here you say good-by to civilization, stores, beds, white women and children, police and post office. It is not a big place, but either Mrs. Jack Hayes or Mrs. Quigley will board you and set before you dishes which seem worthy of Lucullus, should you be "coming out," salivated by a steady diet of pork, beans and baking powder. "Going in" you are, naturally, not so easily impressed.

Our canoe was soon alongside, loaded and ready for the start, and most of the adult population, together with all the dogs, came down to see us off. We had come to know the *Nipawin's* people so well that it seemed like leaving old friends. There were Captain Deacon, and Captain Webber, and W. Venables, the engineer, and last, but certainly not least in our affections, E. Mortimer, Cambridge wrangler and chef and cordon blue with two bars. I fancied they feared for the fate of such as trust themselves to big lakes late in the fall in a 14-foot canoe, but they should have recalled the kindly way in which Providence looks after children and—others.

Facing our landing were some 8000 tons of the yellow copper ore from the Mandy, and on the bank alongside were hundreds of other tons, each brought at great expense from the mine by team over a desperately long road.

Then began the painfully slow progress up-stream with pole by two men whose united strength sometimes barely sufficed to overcome the hurrying water. Goose Creek is not deep but it is swift and full of glacial boulders, and the fifteen miles of it which must be climbed to reach Goose Lake is as provoking a bit of canoeing as a man need pit himself against. After going five miles we halted for the night, as we had started late, neither man was particularly fit, and things had to be sorted out and packed in better shape. The evening was beautiful, but before midnight the rain was falling in torrents driven by a howling gale.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

Let us, as the kiddies say, make believe this is the morning of September 19th, and after a cup of tea and a rasher of nice fat bacon we will get into the canoe and propel it further against that brutal current—but before doing so let me explain what a lobster is, for I find that some are so deplorably ignorant as not to know. Fancy anyone residing in the West and not knowing all about lobstersticks! The lobsterstick, dear friends, is a tree which has been despoiled of its limbs excepting a few usually near the top, and which serve as a mark, a monument, or a tribute as the case may be. The Indian has always had the lobsterstick habit; you find evidences of it all through the North. Any athletic young brave will climb a

tall spruce on the faintest provocation and turn it into a lobsterstick that its own progenitors would not recognize. This was almost the only form of voluntary exercise that our native sons were given to, and of late they are losing some of their enthusiasm even for it.

Three hours' alternate poling, portaging and paddling brought us to the foot of Goose Lake, where we were halted by a southwest gale that kept us prisoners for 24 hours. Time hung heavy, though my man enlivened the hours by killing Whiskey Jacks. Personally I rather like to see these birds, whose real name is the Canadian Jay, around, but most trappers hate them with a hatred venomous in its intensity because they are persistent and cunning robbers of snares. My retainer proved to be the champion, king-pin Whiskey Jack hunter of the Athapapuskow, his only weapon being a short club which he hurled with marvellous dexterity.

Next morning the wind had dropped and we started bright and early, because you can never trust Goose Lake; by noon we were lunching on a small islet near the mouth of Rat Creek, twelve miles from our previous camp.

Here the igneous rocks begin to come in, granitic intrusions being common and a coarse hornblend schist noticeably so. We had up to this been traversing the flat, uninteresting, Ordovician dolomites, but evidently were about to enter on a more promising region.

Rat Creek is not so bad as it used to be, since the government has cleared a narrow channel up which a canoe may pass, but it is bad enough, the last pitch being the worst. After this, a mile or two of calm water brought us to the fire rangers' hut where we landed and gave an account of ourselves. A. Horrick is the present guardian, a returned man who saw active service with the Fort Garry Horse. His garden was an evidence that up to September 20th there could hardly have been a touch of frost, for his lettuce, carrots, and other vegetables were large and well grown.

This night we camped by the shores of Lake Athapapuskow, one of the most charming lakes in the whole Dominion. It has hundred of rocky islands, each one spruce clad; its waters are so clear that you can trace the outlines of each pebble ten feet below; in it are found lake trout which tip the beam at 32 pounds as they come out of the water and which often grow to 80 pounds and over after death. Of course, the habit is not peculiar to the fish of this lake, but the growth is, perhaps, more rapid and more pronounced in Athapapuskow than in most waters.

We had won our way into the mining district. We were on the border of the dolomites, and in every direction excepting south could indulge in a prospecting orgy with a good chance of success. To the westward lay the Flinflon and Schist Lake district; to the north Pineroot, Thompson Lake and many another promising area; to the eastward the three Cranberries, Elbow, Reed, Island and Herb Lakes offered, and continue to offer, opportunities of sudden wealth almost equal to buying 10 cent shares whose par value of \$1 is to be reached, so they say, before the snows of age come to us.

It was yet blowing, because just as soon as we had crossed Goose Lake old Boreas sent a new hand to the bellows, though

I omitted to record it at the time: in future the reader will please bear in mind that unless I write otherwise, it is blowing, raining, snowing, or freezing throughout the remainder of the trip. Such a short residence would not warrant me in decrying the climate, yet I must say—but no matter!

Twelve and a half miles on September 21st brought us to Baker's Narrows, our camp being pitched a mile or so below it to escape the attentions of the numberless huskies and near huskies which Baker's Indian neighbors own but do not as a rule feed regularly through the summer. It is understood throughout this region that the dead fish which drift ashore should suffice any fair-minded dog during the non-working period. It is hard on the dog and many do not survive, but it is the custom of the country. Baker and the other white men feed their dogs, but not so the Indian; his train must be self-supporting from April to October.

About this time my two-horse power Indian began to get very, very tired.

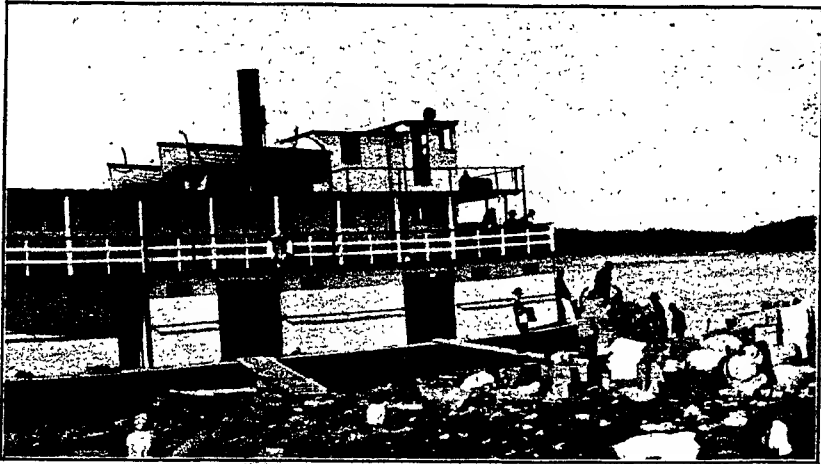
Perhaps you have noticed, too, that the average Indian takes to the bush with reluctance and leaves it with alacrity? For him the wilderness holds no charm of novelty; he much prefers the twelve-by-sixteen shack, air-tight and germ infested, and the society of his garrulous friends to the southing of the winds in the spruces, and all the rest of it. Also, he has a holy horror of steady work; there are, naturally, numerous exceptions but those who know the facts of the case will certainly not dispute these conclusions.

Here we met G. R. Bancroft, an old-timer in the district, who has of late occupied the important position of chief transport officer for the Mandy Mine. With him was F. Bickles, of The Pas. They were on their way to inspect some claims at Thompson Lake, which Mr. H. J. Bickles, of The Pas, controlled, and the trip ended in an option being taken on the group by Mr. Bancroft, for the Tonopah company. David Connor lives at the Narrows. He is an Indian with an unusual aptitude for work, quite remarkably so, indeed, for he it was who found the property on which C. W. Greenlees is now working a crew by the northwest arms of Schist Lake as well as these Thompson Lake claims. Connors works exclusively for the Bickles.

I went with Baker to inspect some claims which he had an interest in a few miles from the landing, and this occupied the entire day. We had a snug camp and the usual fine evening with rain at midnight, to which we were becoming accustomed; the climatic freaks north of fifty-four are bewildering. When the days are fine they are very, very fine, and when they are otherwise they are horrid. Each clear night we had auroras such as people living further south rarely if ever see, and this was summer, almost—what they are like on a winter's night must be left to the imagination.

On September 23rd we got off soon after daybreak, and after paddling a mile were held up by a furious north gale. We passed several hours perched on a point watching the white caps and wishing for a big canoe and an Evinrude (half the prospectors own such things up there), but toward afternoon the wind dropped a little and we made a final start for the Chica mine on the Pineroot. Here we found ourselves in a bit of old Sweden. There are four

men there, and three of them come from the Baltic, and we strongly suspected the fourth. Hugo Osterberg, foreman in charge, showed me over the property, and I tried some snapshots, but owing to the poor light they turned out punk. Eight bore holes have been put down, some to 700 feet; and they are taking out a three-quarter inch core by the aid of a Sullivan outfit. For the past two years work has been carried on, and considering the Chica "group" consists of but one claim, and that a good deal of money must have been spent, it betokens a certain faith in the undertaking. We had hoped to get through from the Chica to the Greenlees property on the northeast arm of Schist, but low water in the Pineroot forced us to retrace our way to the Narrows and to take the longer all-water route. We slept this night at the old camp ground opposite Baker's, where we were in the shelter of a bunch of spruce running 7000 superficial feet to the acre.



"Nipawin" at Sturgeon Landing

(Photo courtesy Mr. F. M. Ruggles)

This would seem an appropriate place to mention the lumber resources of the region. Taken by and large, the country would not appeal to an experienced lumberman. There are, perhaps, some 25,000,000 feet of good lumber around Lake Athapapuskow, and scattering bunches elsewhere, and, of course, lashings of pulpwood, but the country must have been swept by a tremendous fire many years ago, and the second growth is mostly poplar and other inferior woods. The remnants of the original spruce forests show that the climate will permit a fine growth if given sufficient time, but that time is the essence of the contract, for the Spring comes late and the Fall comes early, and tree girth increases probably much more slowly than is the case further south.

## CHAPTER V.

To go from Baker's Landing to the Mandy mine you follow a "V" route. The first leg is six miles long and runs in a southwesterly direction, then turn an acute angle and paddle northwest for a further eight miles, and there you are. We started gaily enough on the morning of the 24th of September, and went on bravely with a furious gale behind until we came to the turn, after which we fought against a hurricane for a couple of miles. It was no go, we made such lamentably slow headway that camping seemed indicated, so ashore we went and remained in a camp that was, as usual, comfortable and sheltered until the following morning. The wind having then eased off, the buildings of the Mandy mine hove in sight about 10 a.m.

I must confess that I beheld the head-frame of this remarkable property with much the same reverence a pilgrim sees the shrine he has travelled far to visit. For months the Mandy and its 20-per-cent. copper ore had fascinated my imagination, the best I had ever known, intimately, carrying only 1.25 per cent.; so I stepped ashore with the liveliest anticipation, feeling that the solid flesh I had lost poling up that abominable Goose Creek, and its sister in infamy, Rat Creek, had not been lost but given in a good cause.

On this great property there was just one man; one man and a lot of magnificent hauling dogs. The man was Mr. Walter Rose, and his train of huskies is, they say, the best in the whole north. I had been given a letter to Rose by Mr. Bancroft, at the Narrows, and this proved sufficient introduction, though had I lacked it such is the hospitality of the country I should have been well received. The Mandy is rich in empty houses. There are dozens of them, indeed seeing that the working force probably never numbered more than 35, the wonder grows, until you recollect something about there having been 400 teams hauling—a few hundred more or less is of no moment—and then you see daylight.

We were assigned as residence the old office. Herein we made ourselves comfortable and dried out. After eating, Rose took me all over the workings and explained everything, answering questions freely and frankly. All that remains of the rich ore is a lens estimated to hold perhaps \$60,000 of 20-per-cent. ore, which it was not considered expedient to extract. The lens of high grade gave out at 200 feet, the length being 225 feet, and the width 18 feet. For high copper content it has rarely been excelled. Mr. H. C. Carlisle was the engineer in charge of operations during the couple of years the mine was operated. The company owns between thirty and forty claims, some full size, others fractions, there being undoubtedly great quantities of ore which though far lower in copper than the famous lens would yet be high grade in most camps. This ore will be smelted when the smelter, or smelter, as certain purists call reduction works, is built. And here I would make a point which is as it seems to me an important one. If the smelter is to be given government aid of any sort, either in the shape of a railway to it, or a bonus, or a guarantee of bonds, then by all means let the government insist on a clause whereby the smelter agrees to accept all ores offered and to treat them at a fair rate, otherwise the smaller properties will one by one be gobbled up by the big concern, to the

detriment of the district. There will be dozens, perhaps hundreds, of properties in the district which will have ore to ship, but will not be sufficiently important in themselves to induce capitalists to build smelters. A prospector having a fair but small deposit of copper ore, would be compelled to sell out to the smelter for what he could get, as his property would otherwise be a white elephant. But with a customs smelter and fair smelting charges the situation would be materially different; then the small man would come into his own.

There is a fine duplex compressor of seven drills capacity, ample boiler power, steam hoist, and machine shop with a complete layout of tools; in fact, when the Mandy decides to resume there will not be much lacking. The Mandy navy was the same thing on fresh water as the British fleet is at sea—supreme. Everywhere there are tugs, and barges, and powerful sternwheel steamers, all of which have cost a goodly portion of the \$3,000,000 which rumor says was obtained from the sale of ore.

This night the wind was so terrific that the building threatened to come down about our ears; it also froze hard. Jack Mosher, one of the discoverers of the Flinflon, came over in the morning and we got him to pilot us to the property. Our route lay up Schist Lake, then through Ross Creek, and after leaving the canoes, up a steep trail and across a high summit to the Flinflon. On the way we saw a bull and a cow-moose.

The Flinflon is a hard thing to describe so that anyone who has not seen it can grasp the immensity of the thing. You can stand on a "horse" of country rock and look over an ore body which is visible and proved for 3,000 feet in length by 500 feet in breadth. Flinflon lake is but 12 feet deep nearly anywhere, and as there is a fall of 28 feet at the foot of the lake it will be an easy matter to run it dry. Here there may be many times as much ore as has been proved by diamond drill, so that it is improbable that they will run out of copper for a generation or two no matter how capacious the smelter may be. The Flinflon comprises 10 full chains and six fractions, in all some 750 acres. Tom Creighton is in charge and showed me around. I had met him on Goose Lake and envied the ease with which he transported a 19-foot canoe and some 750 pounds of cargo without assistance. There are not many city men who could do it.

All Friday we were held in camp at Mandy by a gale and rain, but bright and early on September 27th, we said good-bye to Rose, and with a favoring breeze started to retrace our course to Baker's Narrows. We paddled 21 miles with but one brief halt for lunch and camped well down the eastern shore of Lake Athapapuskow. At the Narrows we chatted a few minutes with Gus Rosen, who showed me some remarkably fine samples of gold ore and galena from Copper Lake, and chalcopyrite in quartz from a claim he owns somewhere else. Here we also met Lieut. J. A. Wilson and his partner Ball on their way to Balsam Lake for the winter. Wilson had been a fellow passenger on the Nipawin and had shown himself a fair hand in a canoe by navigating successfully the impetuous waters of Goose and Rat Creeks.

We now had to face the one thing my Indian dreaded more even than soap and water—the long portage from Athapapuskow to the



first Cranberry Lake. It is a measured 104 chains, and the most beautifully level, smooth portage I recall. We got there by midday on the 28th, and it took me just 30 minutes to cross with a 75 pound pack on my back. I had to hire help of a passing Indian to get the rest of the stuff over.

Here one launches on waters which reach the Bay by way of the Grass River. Three days' hard paddling would take you to Herb Lake, and all the way there are exposures of rock that, should you be a prospector, ought to tempt you to explore. No doubt there will be many a sensational find between Athapapuskow and Herb Lakes in the days to come.

Our camp this night was at the foot of the first Cranberry Lake, 19 miles from our previous one. In the morning we met John McLeod at the narrows between the first and second Cranberries,



A Typical Cabin in the Mining Districts

and had a long chin with him. This man is a treaty Indian and so cannot stake claims for himself, but is reputed to have discovered some of the very best in Copper Lake, it having been his own particular hunting ground, and consequently familiar to him.

We reached the divide between Brunne and Copper Lakes by evening. This, like the sand ridge between Athapapuskow and Cranberry, is due to galcial action. All this country shows unmistakably the effects of the ice cap it lay under, and in places the striae are wonderfully fresh. Little tails of sand on the southwest side of each hillock show the direction of the ice movement from northeast to southwest.

A big bull moose with a fine head almost walked into camp. His lady love was close at hand.

We had come 20 miles, made four portages, and were, at last, on the border of a region which has become famous in a day, because of the surprisingly rich finds of free gold made on one of the claims belonging to J. P. Gordon.

## CHAPTER VI.

On the last day of September I made my bow to Copper Lake. The fame of this district has penetrated to the uttermost parts of the earth, even the *London Times* gave space to an account of the finds made on J. P. Gordon's claims. To those who have seen our other pre-Cambrian gold camps—Porcupine, Tashota, Rice, Gold, Long and Hay Lakes—the appearance of everything will be familiar. Here are the same occurrences of sheared greenstone and intruding porphyry; sporadic outcroppings of sensational gold quartz; similar big deposits of lower grade, promising, however, returns such as ought not to be expected from the narrow, lenticular veins carrying the spectacular ore; the same signs pointing to an original barren matrix enriched later by gold-bearing solutions owing their birth to the intrusion of the porphyry. The Big Gordon lead will, there is little doubt, give wealth to a man who has done great work and helped to bring The Pas district to the notice of the world. I cannot pretend to say how big it is, but there must be a couple of thousand feet of it in one place, while other claims exist along the strike that are thought to be on the same lead.

The very rich lead is a small thing, and its principal value will possibly prove to have been in the attention it called to Copper Lake. The area of known schist is comparatively small and has been about all staked, but it may be found to extend in several directions into the granite, and at and near the contacts we may rather confidently expect to hear of new discoveries. Mr. Gordon is going to work in a sensible way; though deluged with offers—he declined them all, and having command of ample means is planning extensive exploration during the winter. He had plenty of supplies on the ground, he will soon know a deal more about the probable value of his numerous holdings than is known today.

The big lead is from 15 to 30 feet wide where it has been trenched.

The Pederson claim, lying three-quarters of a mile north of Gordon's claims, is showing fine mineralization, the ore consisting of galena, chalcopyrite, and pyrite. He, too, seems to have a valuable property.

On Brunne Lake some of the openings on the Dominion group hold like minerals and are believed to have merit. Of course, there are many other claims, but as they were not seen by me I offer no comment upon them, though no doubt many will warrant development.

For a brand new camp Copper Lake is showing up well, and should give confidence to such as propose trying their luck as prospectors in the district. We may feel assured that as the greater area has not been scratched many another claim merely awaits its finding by the man with the thews of a giant, the patience of Job, and the digestion of an ostrich—whatever you do don't leave your digestion behind—for you will need it! If I had to choose between cutting out my prospecting pick or my digestion the pick would go into the discard; the baking powder demanded by a regulation bannock is terribly potent.

At one p.m. (it is always well to be as exact as possible) the mist turned into rain, and for forty hours the flood gates of the heavens

were opened. At the close of this distressing spell my blankets were like a sponge, the tent was soaking, the fire a smudge, and the poor little Whisky Jacks masses of draggled feathers, quite cured for the time being of their usual amazing impertinence, content to perch in the thickest spruce and say nothin' to nobody.

But even the rain of the Copper Lake district in autumn lets up at length, and by 7 o'clock on the morning of October 3rd we had broken camp and turned homeward. I had planned to visit Herb Lake but my man convinced me that we might have a tough time getting out, because it would take three days to go and four days to get back to the second Cranberry, and we should certainly require a couple of days at the lake, and October 11 or 12 would be dangerously near to freeze-up the way things were shaping. The climate of the country up there is decidedly different to the brand we enjoy in Winnipeg.

So we crossed Brunne Lake, made a couple of portages, did the whole length of the two Cranberries, and reached the Athapapuskow portage at one o'clock. I met Jacob Cook and his family; mother, children, and dogs, all in a big freight canoe, and I had a talk with him about Copper Lake. He seemed a highly intelligent man and has done good work for Mr. Gordon.

At the portage I had to hire help to assist my Indian to do stunts he ought to have been able and willing to do himself, and then we passed three weary hours watching the white caps come rolling in. Athapapuskow is a superb lake, but like other beauties is inclined to be capricious and to cut up rough at slight provocation. Later on in the afternoon I got desperate and ordered the crew to go on board.

We made the Rangers' shack as dusk was falling, but Horrock was away, so we went on further and camped beneath the stars. That night will dwell in my memory so long as I shall live. The air was absolutely still; as the night fell a hard frost made itself felt, and I took my blankets to the fireside. The dusk deepened and the wonderful northern lights flashed out. It was a riot of celestial color all night, and as I hardly closed an eye, I should be competent to testify regarding the phenomenon.

We had come more than half of the sixty miles separating Copper Lake and Sturgeon Landing, but if we would make civilization by night our work was laid out for us because of the peculiarities of Rat and Goose Creeks. So we hustled through breakfast and pushed off before it was fairly light. We ran nearly everything going to Goose Lake and reached it early, to find a flat calm, something rather unusual. Without losing a minute we plied paddle at thirty strokes a minute and succeeded in reaching Big Island, a couple of miles from the foot of the lake, by noon. I wished to go to the mainland, as I did not like the look of the sky to windward, but my man was very hungry and assured me there would be no wind that day. I yielded and we landed, and ate a hasty luncheon, but I made him leave his dish-washing for later on and insisted on starting. It was well we did; before we had gone a mile the wind came down, and it was all we could do to reach the shelter of the river; had we tarried another half hour we should have been prisoners, as it turned out, on Big island for about 36 hours.

The rest of the run to Sturgeon Landing was devoid of incident. The invaders reached it at 5 p.m. and carried it by storm. We began eating at once and only finished some three hours later, after which I turned in for twelve hours' solid sleep, not having had any for the two previous nights, and having paddled 60 miles.

Moreover, there seemed no reason to keep awake because we had missed the last trip of the Nipawin by just five hours!

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Hayes keep an excellent stopping place, and to those who come in from the bush the spring beds and easy chairs seem to border on sybaritism. There is also another hostel which Mrs. Quigley runs, and which folk say is most comfortable.

Next day Mr. T. Plunkett, D.L.S., turned up, he having finished a long season's work, and like ourselves being bent on the "outside."



Standing—Hon. T. A. Crearer; Wm. Carter; Hon. J. A. Calder; Capt. H. A. Weber.  
Sitting—Hon. A. B. Hudson; Hon. Geo. Bell; Geo. Bancroft, M.E.

Mr. Plunkett proved a most desirable travelling companion. His knowledge, exact knowledge, too, mind you, is unrivalled. This summer he put through 56 miles of the interprovincial boundary between Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

I strolled up to the little graveyard wherein are twenty-three mounds—twenty of them fresh, testimony to the ravages of the flu last winter; a heavy toll out of such a tiny community.

When I arose on the morning of October 6th, it was with the sweet conviction that I should not now have to paddle the 35 miles between Sturgeon Landing and Cumberland House, because on the afternoon pervious the *Prince Albert*, owned by the Mandy company, under the command of Captain John McKillop McLeod, had come in, and on representing to him that I was a British subject in distress, he consented to carrying me out. Mr. Plunkett was another marooned Britisher, and of course the Indian came under the same category. But we were warned that this was the closing trip of the

year, she had come in merely to "clean up," and would get off just as soon as the last wheelbarrow and the rearmost laborer was on board, and we were further cautioned to be on hand when the gang-plank was about to be raised.

You bet, we were on hand! My belief is that my Indian passed the night watching the boat for fear she should get away; at any rate there he was when I went out at grey dawn, fixed and immovable, occupying a commanding position from which he could detect the first evidences of any sinister movements on board.

We said goodbye to the Hayes family with regret, for they had been most kind, and we were all pounds heavier than when we had descended upon the settlement.

## CHAPTER VII.

All the way down stream now, and never a thing to worry about—what bliss! Three meals a day, sure, thanks to the admirable Chinese, who would not let me snap-shot him because he feared being taken for a "Siwash." Every time the camera appeared, he disappeared, seeking the seclusion of his cabin, from whence behind the locked door came mutterings which may have been blessings, but which sounded curiously like the other thing.

The *Prince Albert* is not fitted for passenger accommodation, there being but the absolutely necessary berths for the officers and crew; but what mattered that? In twenty-four hours we should be at The Pas where one could sleep the round of the clock and enjoy goose-hair pillows and all the rest of it!

Though the *Prince Albert* has little cabin accommodation she has most satisfactory engine power; can, so they told me, steam at 16 miles in still water. She handles two, and occasionally three, of the Mandy ore barges with ease and holds them steady in any water. Moreover, Captain McLeod is an experienced river man, one well known on the Peace and the Athabasca, and he can make the old boat do almost anything excepting talk.

Sturgeon Lake provided the usual choice assortment of northland weather. We had snow-squalls and sunshine and enough sea to make the steamer roll somewhat, yet I carried away a pleasing recollection of this fine body of clean water—the last we were to see on the trip, for so soon as you pass through the narrows between Sturgeon and Cumberland you find yourself floating in a liquid that is about 'af-and-'af, part mud and part water. Cumberland Lake will not be a lake for long as it is silting up rapidly. The Saskatchewan has a habit, which it shares with such rivers as the Euphrates, Tigris, Ganges, and others, of cutting new channels, and some years ago it decided to take a short cut and leave Cumberland Lake to one side, since when this has become a sort of back-water and catch-basin for sediment; there will be a lot of rich bottom land available for our grandchildren's experiments in agriculture when the ancient bed of the lake shall have emerged from beneath the waters.

All the way across we were stirring up the mud, proving that although drawing but thirty inches, the *Albert* was dragging along the bottom. Had not the Dominion government kept a dredge at work continuously, there would be but a short season of navigation on Cumberland Lake for either the *Nipawin* or *Prince Albert*.

We made but a brief stop at Cumberland House, because our captain wished to get through the Big Stone rapids ere nightfall. Here I paid off my Indian and said good bye to him and the old canoe. I was sorry to see the last of the latter.

Going down the Big Stone rapids occupies much less time than hauling up, and is infinitely more interesting. At low water it is a formidable place, the surges being tremendous, rocking the big ore barges as though they were featherweights. We got through while the gloaming yet lingered, and then set such a steady pace as promised to land us at The Pas at some unholy hour of the morning. But Providence had ordained otherwise; about midnight we came to the "barrier," the half-way settlement between Cumberland and The Pas, and which it is said, possesses sufficient vitality within itself to walk away whenever so disposed, and anchored; which reminds me that I was extremely fortunate throughout the trip.

As I have written it was midnight when we anchored opposite the barrier, and some one suggested going to bed. The idea caught on and became popular—only where was the bed to be found? Necessity being the mother of invention, some genius—he may have been Mr. Plunkett—suggested moving the crews' dining table a few feet and crawling underneath. This was soon done, though we had to employ secrecy because we did not know how the Chinese would take such evident interference with his domain; some had visions of an enraged Asiatic running amok with a kitchen carver. Three of us crept softly into our blankets, snuggled cosily down on the planks, and fell into that dreamless slumber which comes in the northland alike to those with a good conscience and to those with none.

Daylight only beat the cook to it by a few minutes, and he soon had us up, which was just as well, for by adopting the usual argument we induced him to give us hot coffee, which same went as well as Mary's lamb. It had frozen hard during the night though we had only reached the seventh day of the month.

After breakfast, when thirty miles from The Pas, as I had just ascertained, an alarm S.O.S. signal came from the helmsman in the wheelhouse perched far above the main deck. The captain sprang to the companion-way, and the passengers began to repent the evil lives they had led, for, surely, we were about to be snagged and the water was abominably cold. But it was merely the northland bidding farewell. On the bank stood a bull moose with horns spanning at least 50 inches. He had heard the panting of the steamer's exhaust, and being, as usual at this season, defiant and fearless, had come out of the bush to see who or what was challenging his mastership. It was the last typically wilderness scene. Nor will future travellers enjoy such much longer in this particular part of the wilderness, for civilization is destined to make short work of the big game. It will not all be killed, of course, but it will move on to those happily distant regions where the whistle of the boat, the clang of the locomotive, and the disturbing blast of the miner are never heard. Canada has many such places, and it is only the closet naturalist and the hysterical magazine editor who fear the extinction of our big game.

We landed from the *Prince Albert* at 1 p.m., railway time, than which there is none other at The Pas. Sensible souls; would we had but one time in Winnipeg and that one not railway!

I could not have got away from The Pas until next day had I wanted to, which, however, was not the case. I had to see many old friends, including Dr. R. C. Wallace, commissioner, and Mr. G. E. Rice, editor of *The Pas Herald*, a newspaper which would be a credit to a larger city; Captain H. Webster, and several others. Dr. Wallace had done much to make my trip a success, he even robbing himself of a cherished personal copy of a rare map, without which I should have been stumped at many a turn, for my Indian, although of the ripe age of 57 years, and living all these years at Cumberland, had never had the curiosity to visit the Cranberry Lake region. The white man often marvels at the minute knowledge of the native, but as a rule this knowledge is limited to a small territory; left to himself, the Indian rarely goes far afield and has little of the instinct for exploration which permeates the being of the Anglo-Saxon.

I ought to have been on hand when the Hudson Bay bi-monthly limited started next morning, but I was not. By all accounts it was a sight to be remembered and I am sorry I missed it. The fishermen and prospectors were taking out their winter supplies and outfits, which latter included some 200 dogs of the more or less husky breed. Extra cars had to be added at the last moment, and the air was not full of a stillness that could be felt—not exactly. The husky can't bark, but he can put up a famous imitation of a wolfish howl.

Next day, October 8th, I reached Winnipeg and my trip to the Land of the Lobstick was but a memory of a wonderfully attractive region, and of a people not yet spoiled by the greed of speculation. I shall inflict one more contribution on a long-suffering public and it will deal with the outfits necessary for travel, together with a few conclusions which I arrived at, personally, as to the future of the country—but no one need read these unless he likes. This is a free country, excepting that you must not follow your own inclinations in any single particular.

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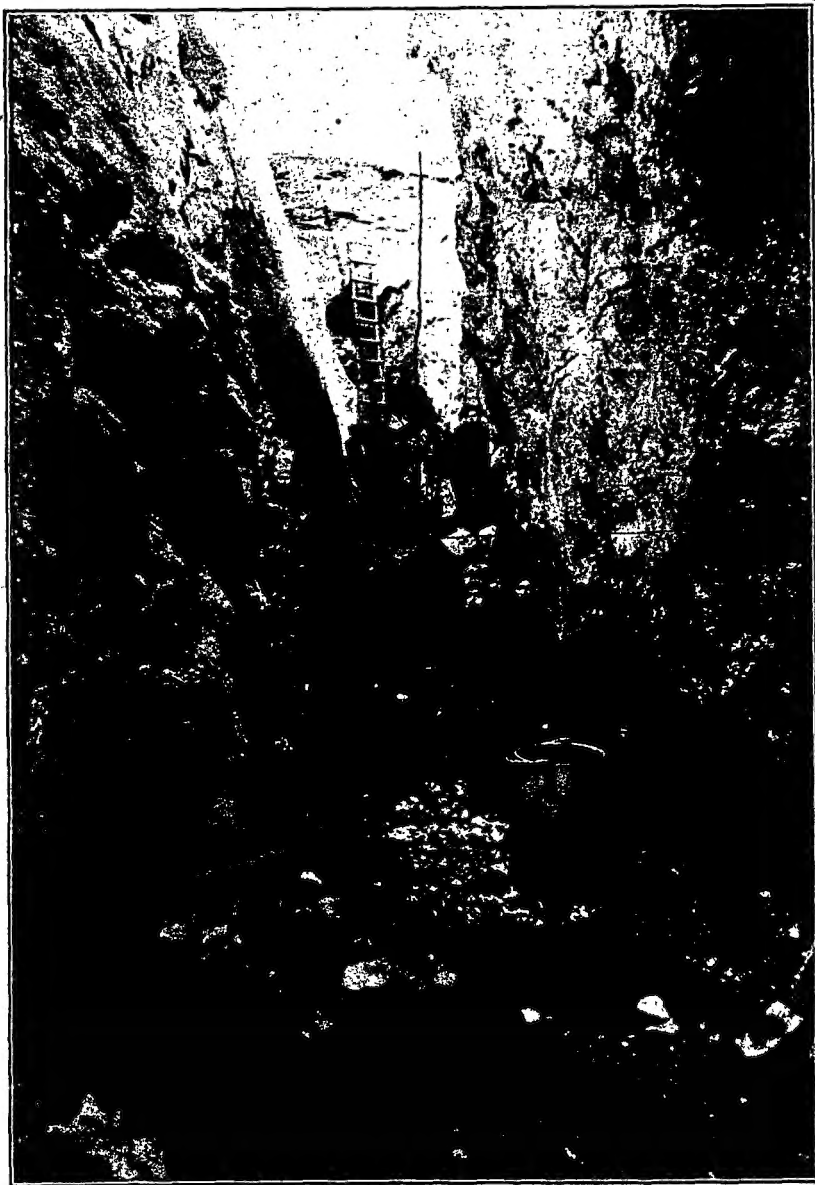
## CHAPTER VIII.

Like Jacob of old; the prospector is a plain man living in tents—so let us consider the tents. The experienced woodman is just as particular about his dwelling as is a city lady moving in the best circles, though for more solid reasons; the tyro will take any kind of an old tent, but the other requires the best. As prospecting is usually carried on in summer, let us first choose our warm-weather shelter, and it will differ much from the one we ought to have with us on the winter trail.

The curse of the north is the fly. From about the tenth day of June until the beginning of August the mosquito, the black fly, the bulldog, and the bite-em-no-see-em, or sand fly, a pestiferous little beast, wicked out of all proportion to its size, do what they can to render life unbearable to hundreds of thousands of people. So a tent should be fly-proof, and the only way to make it so is to have no openings excepting one which you crawl through, and which is fitted with cheesecloth, or some similar substance, closed by a string. There must be a floor-cloth sewn to the sides, and no openings at the top of the tent, but, instead, four or five double



tapes or cords, with which to fasten the ridge to a rope or pole. Being so equipped you may repose in comfort, either by night or day, and derive a grim satisfaction listening to the hum of the myriads of bloodsuckers outside. They say it is only the lady mos-



Open Cut, Mandy Copper Sulphite Mine, Schist Lake

quito which bites—if so the fair sex must be enormously preponderant, for I do not recollect having met with a mosquito that would not attack me at sight. Most people use canvas for their tent, but personally I prefer drilling, as it is light and sheds rain if properly

map, tinware, copy of mining laws, packsack, reflector, tea, bacon, evaporated apples, sugar, truemilk, beans, prunes, flour, mess pork, rice, baking powder, oatmeal, pepper, salt, yeast cakes, pilot biscuit, corn meal, matches, tobacco (that is if you smoke), mitts and gloves, 50 feet of strong inch rope, 25 feet ditto, watch, twine, notebook and pencil, envelopes (stamped) and some notepaper, overalls, moccasins, boots, and such clothing as you deem best.

Of course you will have your pick and gold pan, or perhaps two, because a couple make an excellent oven in which to bake the bannock.

But surely, I fancy I hear some ask, mining is not the only industry that will flourish north of 53 degrees? No, there will always be a certain amount of trapping, some fishing for market, and some lumbering operations, but there seems no doubt that the prosperity of The Pas district, at any rate, is bound up with the growth of mining. There are millions of cords of pulpwood, the cutting of which will help to make work and to attract and hold a few thousand people, but it is to the mining of gold and copper that the district must look for its future prosperity.

A farming country it will never be. Garden crops do well enough, but agricultural lands are scarce, and such as there are will present few attractions to those who know the fertile prairie lands to the southward.

"The wilderness must feed its wayfarers" is an old axiom, but one that the white man construes liberally. He needs something besides dried moosemeat or hung fish. But the gun, and net, and troll, will furnish a very welcome addition to the provisions packed out from settlements. Big game is but moderately abundant—we saw just five moose in three weeks, whereas I have been close to a dozen in one day in another section of the province—caribou or bear we saw nothing of, though we did see many duck, mostly far up and migrating, and the ruffed grouse were more numerous than I, at least, have ever seen them.

Some of the lakes swarm with fish. Coming down Rat Creek there were hundreds of magnificent whitefish stranded in a backwater, and I turned from my own particular task in time to see a couple of fierce ones attacking my Indian. The struggle was terrible; for a few seconds it seemed a toss-up whether he would go into the water or the fish find their way into the canoe—happily the fight ended in favor of the man. These fish graced the platter at a certain brotherly feast given to my man by his fellows at Sturgeon Landing, and I was told that they were fine in flavor.

And now having concluded these rambling notes of a journey into a land that is about to take on a new complexion, I will wind up.

